



Good Friday

10 April 2020

Introduction

Life and death stand side by side as we enter into Good Friday. In John's passion account, Jesus reveals the power and glory of God, even as he is put on trial and sentenced to death. Standing with the disciples at the foot of the cross, we pray for the whole world in the ancient bidding prayer, as Christ's death offers life to all. We gather in solemn devotion, but always with the promise that the tree around which we assemble is indeed a tree of life. We depart silently, and we anticipate the culmination of the Three Days in the proclamation of the Easter news. (from the Sundays and Seasons ELCA worship resource)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray:

Merciful God, your Son was lifted up on the cross to draw all people to himself. Grant that we who have been born out of his wounded side may at all times find mercy in him, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

A reflection before reading the Passion according to St. John...

The words of the above Prayer of the Day break the silence of our gathering on Good Friday evening. There is no prelude. No greeting. Just silence. Then the prayer.

This prayer is actually offered as the alternative prayer for this holy night, but I can't help but turn again and again to that image of Jesus "being lifted up," for I have come to see it as a key to understanding not only the Passion but the whole Gospel message and its significance for this broken, tragically divided and frightened-by-death world in which we live.

"Merciful God, your Son was lifted up on the cross to draw all people to himself..."

In the brilliance of John's Gospel telling this image of Jesus being lifted up is a recurring one, only thinly veiling from early on the life giving purpose of his journey to the cross.

Three times in this Gospel Jesus speaks of the time when he will be lifted up. Early on he declares to Nicodemus (remember him — the curious one who comes to Jesus seeking light in the dead of night and then the one whom we watch tonight tend to Jesus' crucified body?) ... early on Jesus says that like Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness as a life giving sign to those who looked on it, the Son of Man (the way Jesus refers to himself) must be lifted up that all might know life in him. (see John 3.14-15)

Then later, the third time, Jesus already in Jerusalem, fully aware of what awaits him there, and not willing to run from it, tells those at his side — some questioning, some disturbed by his words: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." (12.32) It should be noted that some translators widen that phrase to say not only "all people," but "all things," which reminds us of God's mercy and care for the whole creation, a very valuable and appropriate reminder. (And as you pray those historic, timeless Bidding Prayers a bit later keep this in mind, for those prayers, rooted in the 3rd century, reflect well Jesus' deep longing and desire to draw the whole creation into

his wide embracing arms on the cross.) Indeed, as Richard Rohr has written, “Jesus being ‘lifted up’ is offered as a healing icon of love to all of history.”

There is an intriguing ambiguity in the Greek word that is translated as “lifted up.” And it is clear that John uses this ambiguity quite intentionally. On the one hand it can refer to the crucifixion – to lifting up a victim on a cross to leave him there to die. But oddly enough, the word is also used for the enthronement of a king – being lifted up to a position of honor, power and might. So what was it for Jesus – lifted up to death on a cross, or lifted up to reign as king? Is it one or the other? Or is it somehow both at once? In execution can there be exaltation, enthronement?

Therein lies the deep irony that runs through the Gospel. Remember when John proclaimed in that soaring, song-like prologue to the Gospel: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory...full of grace and truth.” (1.14). Some kind of glory he leads us into tonight. Not quite what we would expect, but there’s where John is leading us. But then we need to remember who’s at work here... a God who opts more often than not, as Martin Luther often reminds us, to work in opposites – in ways hidden, elusive, strange and odd. As the hour of his passion approaches Jesus announces to his friends: “The time has come for the son of man to be glorified.” (12.23). The cross looms.

When St. Paul declares to the Corinthians that in the cross we see God at work choosing what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, choosing what is weak to shame the strong, he’s pretty much singing in concert with John. For tonight as we listen once again to John’s Passion telling, we are given to see God’s glory revealed in the place where to all human appearances there is no glory at all. “The word ‘glory’ (*doxa* in the Greek) sometimes connotes honor, but John’s Gospel glory also has to do with the way God is revealed to human beings.”¹ Not a very glamorous glory perhaps, but God’s glory. “God’s way in the world leads to the cross,” Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, “and through the cross to life.”

Holy paradox. That’s what this is. In death a new creation is conceived. On an executioner’s cross the Lord of all is enthroned. “The crucifixion was His triumphal coronation,” writes Orthodox theologian, Sergius Bulgakov. “In the world He manifests His Kingdom by the meekness and obedience of crucified love. The cross is His instrument, and the crucifixion is his victory...The sign of His victory is the cross.”² And on that cross, God’s beloved crucified Son stretches out his arms to draw all people, the whole creation, into this holy contradiction and into his divine healing, making us whole in his brokenness. By his bruises we are healed, Isaiah sings. Glory be for this grace.

There’s a line from the church of the 2nd century that captures well the meaning of the cross and Jesus’ passion revealed to us in John’s Gospel. I have it written across the top of one of the pages of John’s Passion telling in my well-worn working Bible at home. It says: **The Lord reigns from the wood [the wood of the cross].** Today the Lord, loving us to the end, is lifted up, stretching out his arms of mercy so that everyone, the whole earth and everyone and everything within it, might come within reach of his saving embrace.

¹ The Word of Life, a Theology of John’s Gospel,” Craig R. Koester, (Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), p. 120.

² Quoted in article “Crucified and Triumphant,” by James Paxton, Christian Century, September 11, 2019, p. 21.

Yes, tonight, **The Lord reigns from the wood [the wood of the cross]**. Tonight on the cross we behold the glory of God...full of mystery, irony, wonder, truth, grace and astonishing healing, life giving, life saving love. And this is why we call this Friday good.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL: JOHN 18:1--19:42

¹[Jesus] went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. ²Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. ³So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. ⁴Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" ⁵They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. ⁶When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they stepped back and fell to the ground. ⁷Again he asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." ⁸Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go." ⁹This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, "I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me." ¹⁰Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. ¹¹Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

¹²So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. ¹³First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. ¹⁴Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people. ¹⁵Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, ¹⁶but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. ¹⁷The woman said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." ¹⁸Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

¹⁹Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. ²⁰Jesus answered, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. ²¹Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said." ²²When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" ²³Jesus answered, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" ²⁴Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

²⁵Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, "You are not also one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." ²⁶One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" ²⁷Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

²⁸Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. ²⁹So Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" ³⁰They answered, "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." ³¹Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law." The Jews replied, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." ³²(This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

³³Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" ³⁴Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" ³⁵Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" ³⁶Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." ³⁷Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." ³⁸Pilate asked him, "What is truth?"

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, "I find no case against him. ³⁹But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" ⁴⁰They shouted in reply, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a bandit.

^{19:1}Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. ²And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. ³They kept coming up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and striking him on the face. ⁴Pilate went out again and said to them, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him." ⁵So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!" ⁶When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him." ⁷The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God."

⁸Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. ⁹He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰Pilate therefore said to him, "Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?" ¹¹Jesus answered him, "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." ¹²From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor."

¹³When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. ¹⁴Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, "Here is your King!" ¹⁵They cried out, "Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The

chief priests answered, "We have no king but the emperor." ¹⁶Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus; ¹⁷and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. ¹⁸There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. ¹⁹Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." ²⁰Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. ²¹Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" ²²Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." ²³When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. ²⁴So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it." This was to fulfill what the scripture says,

" They divided my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots."

²⁵And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." ²⁷Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

²⁸After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty." ²⁹A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. ³⁰When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

³¹Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. ³²Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. ³³But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. ³⁵(He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) ³⁶These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, "None of his bones shall be broken." ³⁷And again another passage of scripture says, "They will look on the one whom they have pierced."

³⁸After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. ³⁹Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. ⁴⁰They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴²And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

THE BIDDING PRAYER

(As you pray this historic prayer you are invited to keep silence in the indicated places. Think on those people and concerns to which you are invited. Pray slowly and widely. Let the Spirit work through your heart and mind.)

Let us pray, brothers and sisters, for the holy church throughout the world.

Silent prayer.

Almighty and eternal God,
 you have shown your glory to all nations in Jesus Christ.
 By your Holy Spirit guide the church
 and gather it throughout the world.
 Help it to persevere in faith, proclaim your name,
 and bring the good news of salvation in Christ to all people.
 We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Let us pray for Elizabeth and Jim our bishops, for John and Les our pastors, and for all servants of the church, and for all the people of God.

Silent prayer.

Almighty and eternal God,
 your Spirit guides the church and makes it holy.
 Strengthen and uphold our bishops, pastors,
 other ministers, and lay leaders.
 Keep them in health and safety for the good of the church,
 and help each of us in our various vocations
 to do faithfully the work to which you have called us.
 We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Let us pray for those preparing for baptism.

Silent prayer.

Almighty and eternal God, you continue to bless the church.
 Increase the faith and understanding of those preparing for baptism.
 Give them new birth as your children,
 and keep them in the faith and communion of your holy church.
 We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Let us pray for our sisters and brothers who share our faith in Jesus Christ.

Silent prayer.

Almighty and eternal God, you give your church unity.
 Look with favor on all who follow Jesus your Son.
 Make all the baptized one in the fullness of faith,
 and keep us united in the fellowship of love.
 We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Let us pray for the Jewish people, the first to hear the word of God.

Silent prayer.

Almighty and eternal God,
long ago you gave your promise to Abraham and your teaching to Moses.
Hear our prayers that the people you called and elected as your own
may receive the fulfillment of the covenant's promises.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Let us pray for those who do not share our faith in Jesus Christ.

Silent prayer.

Almighty and eternal God, gather into your embrace
all those who call out to you under different names.
Bring an end to inter-religious strife,
and make us more faithful witnesses
of the love made known to us in your Son.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Let us pray for those who do not believe in God.

Silent prayer.

Almighty and eternal God, you created humanity
so that all may long to know you and find peace in you.
Grant that all may recognize the signs of your love and grace
in the world and in the lives of Christians,
and gladly acknowledge you as the one true God.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Let us pray for God's creation.

Silent prayer.

Almighty and eternal God,
you are the creator of a magnificent universe.
Hold all the worlds in the arms of your care
and bring all things to fulfillment in you.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Let us pray for those who serve in public office.

Silent prayer.

Almighty and eternal God,
you are the champion of the poor and oppressed.
In your goodness, give wisdom to those in authority,
so that all people may enjoy justice, peace, freedom,
and a share in the goodness of your creation.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Let us pray for those in need.

Silent prayer.

Almighty and eternal God,
 you give strength to the weary
 and new courage to those who have lost heart.
 Heal the sick, comfort the dying, give safety to travelers,
 free those unjustly deprived of liberty,
 and deliver your world from falsehood, hunger, and disease.
 Hear the prayers of all who call on you in any trouble,
 that they may have the joy of receiving your help in their need.
 We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Finally, let us pray for all those things for which our Lord would have us ask.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
 thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
 on earth as it is in heaven.
 Give us this day our daily bread;
 and forgive us our trespasses,
 as we forgive those who trespass against us;
 and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
 For thine is the kingdom,
 and the power, and the glory,
 forever and ever. **Amen**

ADORATION OF THE CROSS

We glory in your cross, O Lord,
 and we praise your holy resurrection,
 for by your cross joy has come into the world.
**May God be merciful and bless us;
 may the light of God's face shine upon us.
 Let your way be known upon earth,
 your saving health among all nations.**
 We glory in your cross, O Lord,
 and we praise your holy resurrection,
 for by your cross joy has come into the world.
**Let the peoples praise you, O God;
 let all the peoples praise you.
 May God give us blessing,
 and may all the ends of the earth stand in awe.**
 We glory in your cross, O Lord,
 and we praise your holy resurrection,
 for by your cross joy has come into the world.
 We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
By your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Sing, My Tongue

1 Sing, my tongue, the glo - rious bat - tle; tell the
 2 God in mer - cy saw us fal - len, sunk in
 3 Tell how, when at length the full - ness of the ap -
 4 Thir - ty years a - mong us dwell - ing, Je - sus
 5 Bend your boughs, O tree of glo - ry, your re -

tri - umph far and wide; tell a - loud the won - drous
 shame and mis - er - y, felled to death in E - den's
 point - ed time was come, Christ, the Word, was born of
 went from Naz - a - reth, des - tined, ded - i - cat - ed,
 lax - ing sin - ews bend; for a while the an - cient

sto - ry of the cross, the Cru - ci - fied;
 gar - den, where in pride we claimed the tree;
 wom - an, left for us the heav - 'nly home,
 will - ing, did his work, and met his death;
 rig - or that your birth be - stowed, sus - pend;

tell how Christ, the world's re - deem - er, van - quished
 then an - oth - er tree was chos - en, which the
 blazed the path of true o - be - dience, shone as
 like a lamb he humb - ly yield - ed on the
 and the Lord of heav'n - ly beau - ty gent - ly

death the day he died.
 world from death would free.
 light a - midst the gloom.
 cross his dy - ing breath.
 on your arms ex - tend. (7) A - men.

6 Faithful cross, true sign of triumph,
 be for all the noblest tree;
 none in foliage, none in blossom,
 none in fruit your equal be;
 symbol of the world's redemption,
 for your burden makes us free.

7 Unto God be praise and glory;
 to the Father and the Son,
 to the eternal Spirit honor
 now and evermore be done;
 praise and glory in the highest,
 while the timeless ages run. Amen.

A note on this hymn...At a French convent in the sixth century, the abbess Radegund received what was treasured as a fragment of the true cross. In honor of this token, the poet wrote this hymn for Good Friday.

A note on reading the Passion according to St. John....

It is no secret that each of the four Gospels has its own way of the telling the story of the Passion of Jesus. All are inspired by the Spirit, and “no one of them exhausts the meaning of Jesus. It is as if one walks around a large diamond to look at [them] from different angles. A true picture of the whole emerges only because the viewpoints are different.” (Raymond Brown, A Crucified Christ in Holy Week. Liturgical Press, 1986, pp. 70-71).

Brown, an eminent New Testament scholar who taught for many years at Union Theological School in New York and who died in 1998, describes the account of the Passion in the Gospel according to St. John this way: “John’s passion narrative presents a sovereign Jesus who has defiantly announced, ‘I lay down my life and I take it up again; no one takes it from me’ (10.17-19). When Roman soldiers and Jewish police come to arrest him, they fall to the earth powerless as he speaks the divine phrase, ‘I AM.’ In the garden he does not pray to be delivered from the hour of trial and death, as he does in the other gospels, for the hour is the whole purpose of his life (12.27). His self-assurance is an offense to the high priest (18.22); and Pilate is afraid before the Son of God who states, ‘You have no power over me’ (19.8,11). No Simon of Cyrene appears, for the Jesus of John carries his own cross. His royalty is proclaimed in three languages and confirmed by Pilate. Unlike the portrayal in other Gospels, Jesus is not alone on Calvary, for at the foot of the cross stand the Beloved Disciple and the Mother of Jesus. He relates those two highly symbolic figures to each other as son and mother, thus leaving behind a family of believing disciples. He does not cry out, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ because the Father is always with him (16.32). Rather his final words are a solemn decision, ‘It is finished’ — only when he has decided does he hand over his spirit. Even in death he dispenses life as water flows from within him (see 7.38-39). His burial is not unprepared as in the other Gospels; rather he lies amidst 100 pounds of spices as befits a king.” (Brown, Crucified Christ, pp. 69-70)